

Socialization Derived By Violence

Violence has been used throughout the history of childrearing as a means to socialize children. From human-eating ogres to murdering husbands, the fear of violence is perhaps the one underlying theme in most fairy tales and children's literature. It serves as a great material to conduct the flow of morals to which these stories hold upon socialization, and is argumentally a necessary evil to instill ethics unto a child who would not necessarily understand the underlining higher principles. When taken in a semi-nonrealistic humorous form, it merges with delightful methods to assimilate children into a social being. Extending from this particular variety of children's literature lays a great use of violence in many modern social constructing programs.

Conception of childhood is the essential ingredient required to write literature specifically for children. Evidence of this is found in that the methods to instruct children were vastly different than methods instructing adults. As early as the twelfth century, primary instruction (or primers) towards children was developed with this conception. "With their vivid use of illustrations to teach grammar and religion, these primers revealed an awareness that the perceptions of a child differed from those of adults" (Heywood 22). Where objectivism might flourish to teach an adult, it most likely fails to inspire the mind of a child. Thus, the technique of using a rawer, animalistic danger, rather than the threat of social rejection, to motivate children to conform is perhaps the first response to the new conception of childhood.

Having this conception, Heinrich Hoffmann wrote *Der Struwwelpeter* which consists of several absurd poetic lessons. Judging by its original German title, *Der Struwwelpeter oder lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilder für Kinder von 3–6 Jahren*, it is evident he focused it for children aged three to six years old; his droll lessons would be taken as insult to adults, if seriously used to instruct them. However, by its popularity alone, it served to be a great method to instruct children to the social mores the bourgeoisie upheld. From an adult perspective, sucking one's thumb is an unsanitary habit which may cause teeth deformation and misalignment. –the end result of this being disfigurement, thus being socially deficient in an upper-middle to upper class society. But, Hoffmann realized that a child is absent of these values; so, what better way to demonstrate that thumb sucking is harmful than the threat of a man forcing amputation? However, the underlying threat of violence Hoffmann uses is so exaggerated, and unrealistically pushing Murphy's Law to an extreme, that a child perceives little direct threat.

This droll brutality is the realm I chose to take my final project into. The stories in the project reflect some of our society's norms. It is imperative that one looks both ways before crossing a road, and many children don't realize the harm that can come from insubordination. Always eating fast food might seem like a good thing to a young child, not understanding the basic biochemistry of the human body. So the effect of doing so results in sluggish (stone-like) responses, and almost no energy to expend. The direct correlation of unobservable microorganisms causing disease took centuries for adults to figure out; thus it might prove to be near impossible for a child to simply understand. But, they can recall "the Story of Dirty Dan's Dirty Hands," and take suitable actions not to end up sick and yellow like him. This concept of active violence to prove a point to a child is not uncommon, and readably exploited.

The *Brothers Grimm* fairy tales included many in which young people are battered, abused, abandoned, and murdered. Eyes are pecked out. Hands are cut off. Heads are chopped. In Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Red Shoes," a poor girl is punished by having her feet sliced off. "If you spare the rod, you spoil the child" was the mantra of parents during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout Europe and North America, children were faced with images of the inferno and the devil, who was waiting for them to make a mistake and drag them to hell. (Zipes 133).

Perhaps the oldest example of using violence as a tool to socially adapt is among the lessons learned in religions. Whether it was puritan didactic instruction or pagan verbal fortitude, a commonality throughout the religions is the threat of violent suffering if one does not do as they're told. The move from the perception of children being stuck to an original sin to an instruction that a child forms their own moral virtue often used violent undertones as well. But it was that change in perception which was critical to move into the development of children's literature. "The construction of childhood moved from society's need to redeem the child to one in which the child became the redeemer" (Murray 54). However, a dynamic component to this instruction which many fairy tales capitalize is fear to obedience in either direct or ironical implementation: Cinderella's goodness is instilled upon the fact she does not fight against her stepmother; Little Red Riding Hood would have been spared the traumatizing incident, if she would have minded her mother. But this particular representation of violence, common among most fairy tales, lacks command because the stories most always end in virtuous triumph. Although they are popular, such popularity isn't a result of moral lesions, but rather an introduction to delight. "[A]dventure and delight soon gained an undisputed place in children's reading and continued to find an ever-expanding audience" (Demers 78).

The perverse poetic discords of both my creative project and *Der Struwwelpeter* can be bluntly seen as pure instructional rhetoric; however this is completely wrong when considering the inabsoluteness to every method of inducing moral lessons. Such extreme measures as one's abdomen exploding in flames from eating a few wild berries, or turning to ashes from lighting a match are more likely to suggest laughter rather than fear. "The exaggerated drawings and preposterous situations commented on in [Hoffmann's] doggerel won't necessarily scare readers (more likely, they will and did evoke smiles)" (Zipes 133). So, these satirical violent stories are not completely instructional due to that they bring (perverted) delight, which is a balance sought during the time *Struwwelpeter* was written. "The debate about proper reading matter for children, how to delight and instruct at the same time, originated in the eighteenth century as the middle classes were assuming power" (Zipes 134). Children are taught lessons through directed violence, rather than inconsequential actions. Not only are children effectively instructed in such delightful and violent manners, but all members of modern society experience a sort of socialization through 'violent therapy,' albeit not all of it is apparently delightful.

In modern times, the use of violence as a means for socialization extends to and beyond the adolescent. To obtain the ability to drive an automobile one must undergo a treatment of 'violence therapy.' Images and stories of death accompany a skill check-off exam that is required to move on into the certification. The promise of death or severe disfigurement is given to anyone who does not follow the rules. Little or no concern is

demonstrated to promote the use of traffic safety using non-violent techniques. Also, analogizing the violent act of cracking of an egg, then frying it on a pan, to what one's brain undergoes when they start substance abuse is a common American social reform tactic. It is obvious that such efforts aimed towards an adult audience would be rejected as scare tactics, not maintaining to the issue at hand. These are just a few examples of an endless list of social violent instructional/delightful measures brought forth by the development of children's literature.

Overall, the move to delightful instructionalism brought forth many tools for socialization. A particular brand of this is found within Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*, but it also can found in virtually endless avenues. I chose to write a modern version holding to the notion that extreme violence is sometimes seen as humorous/delightful while converging on Hoffmann's underlying purpose: to instill values incomprehensible to a young child without physical, violent consequences. This same notion parallels many modern, "good" social implementation programs.

Works Cited

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